

Investments and exports shaping the outlook

2014 growth outlook was shaken by flood damages in the middle of the year, but GDP bounced back to the green territory already in 3Q14. 2015 outlook looks more promising, with investments, exports and stable household consumption playing most supportive role. Fiscal developments will be mostly shaped by the outcome of political negotiations and negotiations on new IMF arrangement

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- 2015 should be more encouraging, with the main upsides coming from the investment side (reconstruction of flooded regions) and export sector (more promising growth outlook for main trade partners). Household consumption should maintain its supportive role, while we expect a gradual decline of public consumption, driven by consolidation efforts
- Inflation trajectory is expected to be mostly shaped by low base effect, fading effects of low food prices, intensified investment activity and more favorable movements on the labor market. These factors should outweigh weak cost side pressures (primarily falling oil prices) so we expect inflation moving back to the positive territory, with average 1.5% being our best guess.
- On the international front we expect stabilization of C/A balance, supported by more promising export performance, given the fading effects of floods and more favorable economic outlook for main trade partners. On the financing side we expect stronger FDI footprint, with several projects already in the pipeline
- Monetary outlook for 2015 is shaped by expected recovery of corporate lending and continuation of robust household lending performance. We also expect improvements of financial stability indicators, although we cannot exclude some upside risks to NPLs coming from the weaker performance of the corporate sector in 2H14 (resulting from flood damage)
- IMF-backed program has brought some results, but fiscal consolidation dynamic was slowed by Oct14 elections and flood-related damages. The 2015 fiscal performance will depend heavily on the political situation; with no agreement in the coalition in the first three months of the year, we expect the reform agenda to come into focus only in the second half of the year

Overview of Forecasts

	2015	2016
Real GDP growth (%)	2.4	3.0
Unemployment (%)	26.0	24.5
CPI (%), average	1.5	2.5
Budget balance (% GDP)	-2.0	-1.6
Public debt (% of GDP)	42.0	40.5
Current account (% GDP)	-29.1	-27.0

Ratings	
Moody's	B3
S&P	B3
GDP per capita in PPP (as % of EU28 average)	
	29
Population (in mn)	3.8

Real Economy

Although B&H was strongly hit by massive floods, GDP returned to green territory in 3Q14

After a recessionary 2012, Bosnia & Herzegovina was one of the growth leaders in the CESEE region, with robust 2.5% y/y growth in 2013. Detailed data on GDP components shows that household consumption and net exports served as the main supportive factors, outweighing the fall in investments, primarily in the construction sector. The 2014 outlook seemed promising, but it was shaken by the onset of massive floods in May, with estimated direct and indirect damages to housing, energy and transport sectors spanning from EUR 1bn to EUR 1.5bn (around 10% of GDP). The effects of the flooding translated into the official GDP figures, as the economy shrank 0.5% y/y in 2Q14 (vs. +3.2% y/y in 1Q14). However, already in 3Q14, the economy bounced back into green territory (supported by a stable consumption footprint and recovery of net exports), with the headline figure landing at 0.6% y/y, thus wrapping up the first three quarters of 2014 at 1.1% y/y.

Short-term indicators for the last three months of 2014 show that we could see some acceleration of the growth figure in 4Q14, with average 1.8% y/y growth in the retail sector and 8.5% y/y growth of exports offsetting a 1% yearly decline in industrial production. The 39% y/y growth of completed dwellings indicates that the construction sector will also be supportive of the headline figure. In the same period, we could also see some positive developments on the labor market, with a mild increase of employment, primarily in the manufacturing and energy sector. We expect FY14 growth in the 0.5%-1% band, with the upper part of the band more likely.

Mid-term economic outlook is mostly shaped by domestic and foreign investment footprint

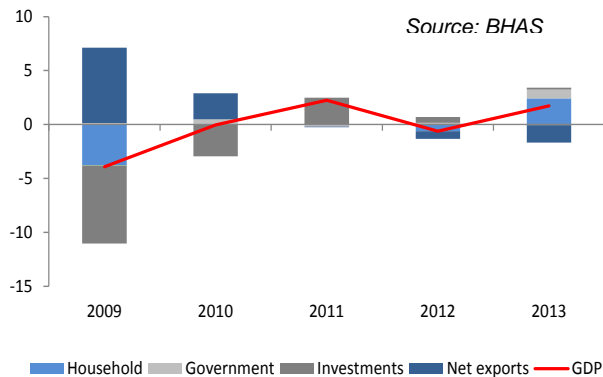
Looking ahead, 2015 could be more encouraging, with the main upsides coming from the investment side and export sector. Announced investments related to reconstruction of flooded regions (mainly financed by IFI assistance funds) and infrastructure projects (e.g. corridor Vc, TP Tuzla and TP Stanari) should give a boost to the construction sector, while the more favorable growth outlook for main trading partners should continue to support exports, which have already shown strong resilience in recent years. We expect increased investments in the energy sector (e.g. the Una Kostela and Vranduk hydroelectric plants) and there are announcements of FDI projects in the tourism sector (e.g. UAE investment in tourist resort Buroj Ozon). Household consumption should maintain its supportive role, while we expect a gradual decline of public consumption, as the government postponed some of the fiscal consolidation measures, backed by the 2012-14 IMF stand-by arrangement, for the post-election period (elections were held in October 2014). With all of this in mind, we see the growth figure in the 2-3% region, although we anticipate implementation risks down the road, coming primarily from politically related uncertainties.

Inflation moving back into the positive territory in 2015

Deflationary pressures in EU also spilled to the CPI footprint in B&H, with the headline figure moving in the negative territory throughout most of 2014. After a 1.5% decline in prices in first half of 2014, in second half of the year we could see some easing of deflation pressures so the FY14 inflation came at -0.9%. In 2015, we expect upside pressures coming from low base effect, fading effects of low food prices, intensified investment activity and more favorable movements on the labor market. These factors should outweigh week cost side pressures (primarily falling oil prices) so we expect inflation moving back to the positive territory, with average around 1.5% being our best guess.

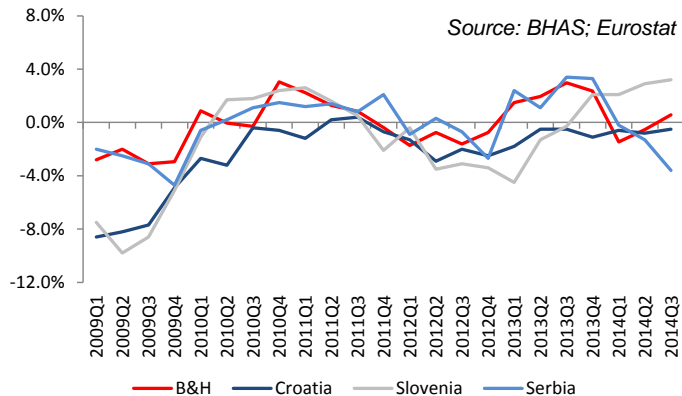
GDP growth in 2013 driven by domestic demand

Real GDP growth and contributions



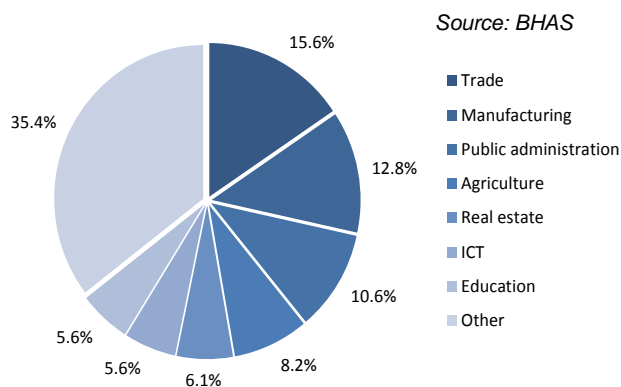
Robust GDP performance compared to peers

Quarterly GDP (y/y figure)



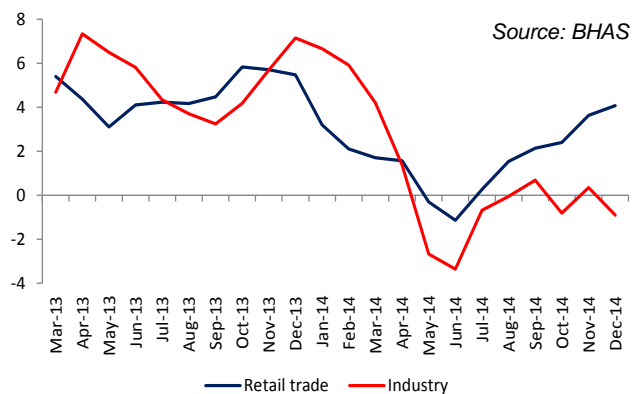
Well-diversified structure of the economy

Shares of NACE categories in GVA (%)



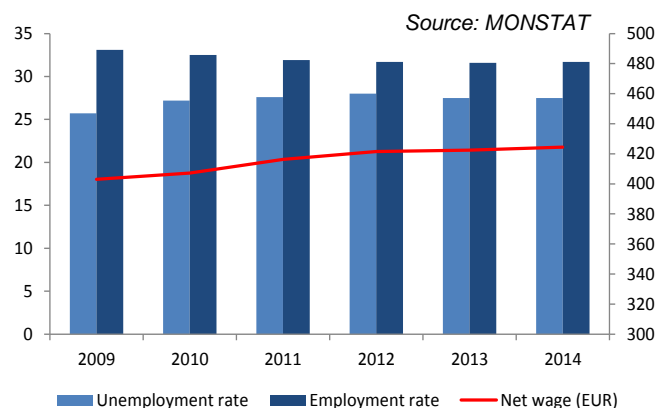
Strong retail offsetting slowdown in industry

Industrial production and retail trade (y/y)



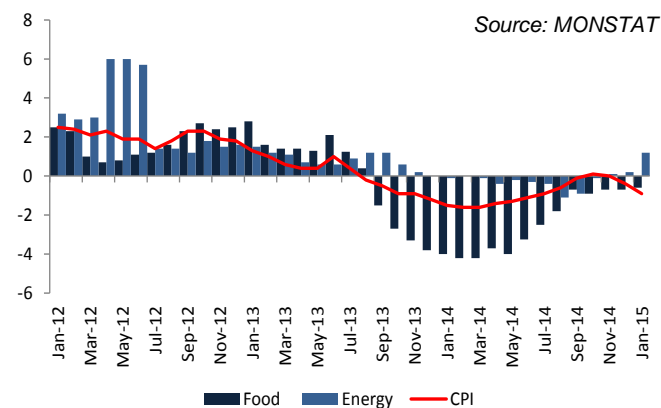
Gradual recovery of the labor market

Unemployment, employment (%) and net wages (EUR)



Low food and energy prices weighing on CPI figure

CPI, food prices and energy prices (y/y)



External Balance

C/A deficit compression stopped in 2014, owing to flood related disruptions in trade balance

After reaching a maximum level of above 14% of GDP in 2008, the C/A deficit gradually compressed to around 6% by the end of 2013. Such developments mostly came as a result of compression of the trade deficit from an alarming 42% to around 30% of GDP, courtesy of the outperformance of exports (average 10% y/y growth) over stagnating imports. However, such a trade deficit level puts significant pressure on the country's external stability, mostly due to the highly import-oriented structure of the economy, with the share of imports in GDP exceeding 50% in 2013 (vs. 29% for exports). On the financing side, in the same period, coverage of C/A by FDI inflows fell from above 45% to around 30%, reflecting the withdrawal of investors from SEE, as well as local political and institutional weaknesses.

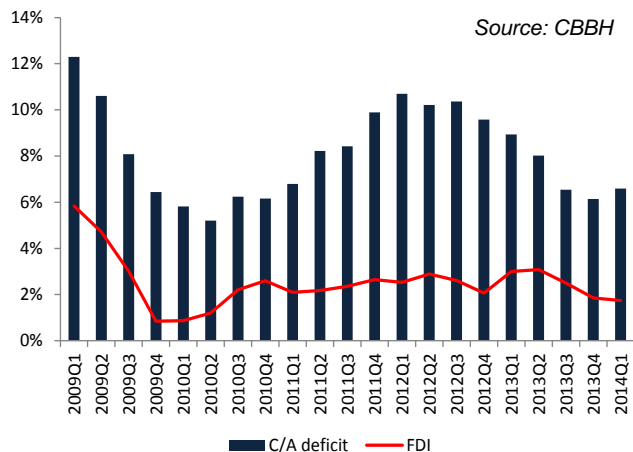
The 2014 outlook looked promising, but the balance of payments showed a deterioration of the C/A balance, mostly driven by losses in the export sector and increased imports related to flood damage in the second quarter of the year. Looking at details, the second quarter brought stagnation of goods exports, after a robust 9% average growth from the beginning of 2013, while goods imports accelerated to their highest levels in years. Services also recorded the sharpest decline since 2009, mainly dragged down by a fall in travel and construction services. The third quarter brought stabilization in all categories, but such developments could not offset the losses from 2Q14, thus resulting in C/A deficit expansion of 25% y/y in 1-3Q14 to 8.1% of GDP (trailing basis). The financing footprint stayed relatively weak, with FDI inflows falling 9% y/y, landing at 2.2% of GDP vs. 2.5% of GDP one year earlier. Looking at the structure, the mining, petroleum and metal production sectors absorbed around 40% of EUR 283mn worth of investments, with most of the investment flows coming from Russian and British investors.

In 2015 we expect gradual decline of C/A deficit figure, supported by more promising exports outlook.

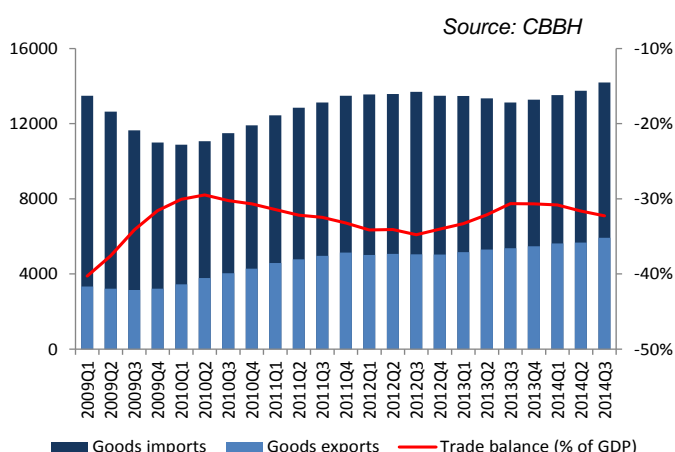
For 2015, we expect some stabilization of the trade balance, supported by a recovery of exports, courtesy of the more favorable growth outlook in the EU and fading effects of the floods. Investments in new energy capacities (mentioned in the previous section) could also contribute to stronger exports in the energy sector, especially in the medium run. Generally, although we see merchandise export capacities still insufficiently diversified, the slowdown in traditional sectors (primarily base metals) was recently offset by a stronger performance in some other sectors, such as machinery, footwear/headwear and chemical products, which we see as the preferred direction in the mid run. On the import side, we expect some upward pressure from intensified investment activity, while falling oil prices on international markets should work in the opposite direction. As for the income accounts, we expect similar developments as in recent years, with a secondary income surplus (remittances and social transfers) playing an important supportive role. We expect the CA deficit to trend modestly downwards towards 7% in the next two years. The FDI footprint should strengthen, moving towards 4% of GDP throughout 2015, with several tourist and energy sector projects already in the pipeline (see above).

The external debt figure kept its mild upward trend in 2014, landing at around 54% of GDP. The debt trajectory was mainly driven by rising public sector debt, while deleveraging in the banking sector kept its steady pace of around BAM 300mn per year. Similar developments are expected in the following years, with the headline figure moving around 54% of GDP, which puts B&H near the bottom of the scale among SEE peers.

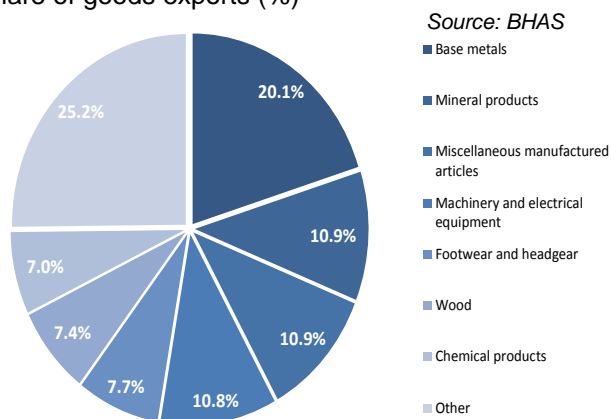
Although narrowing, CAD still on demanding level C/A deficit and FDI flows (4Q rolling sum, % GDP)



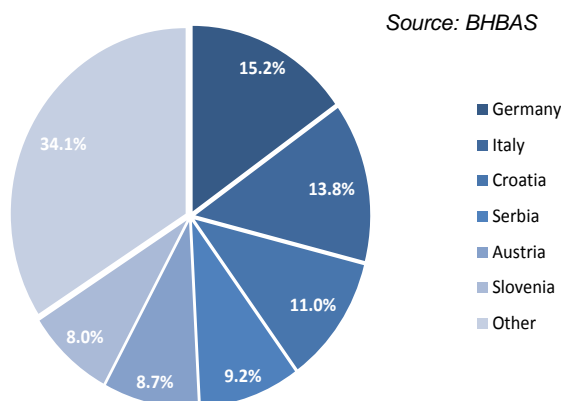
Trade balance gap still on troubling level Trade balance (4Q rolling sum, BAM mn and % GDP)



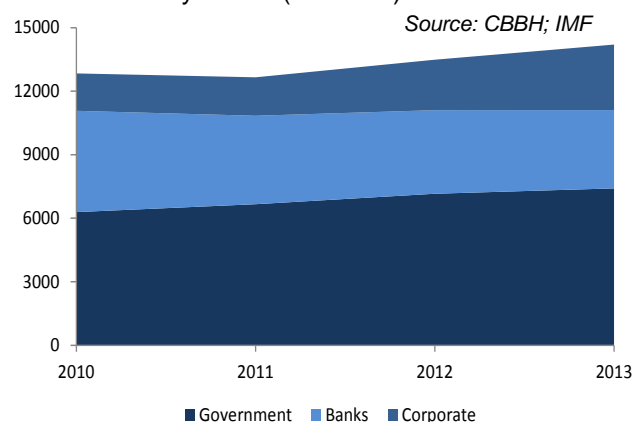
Low value added products dominating export base Share of goods exports (%)



Main export markets – Germany, Italy and Croatia Share of total exports by countries (%)

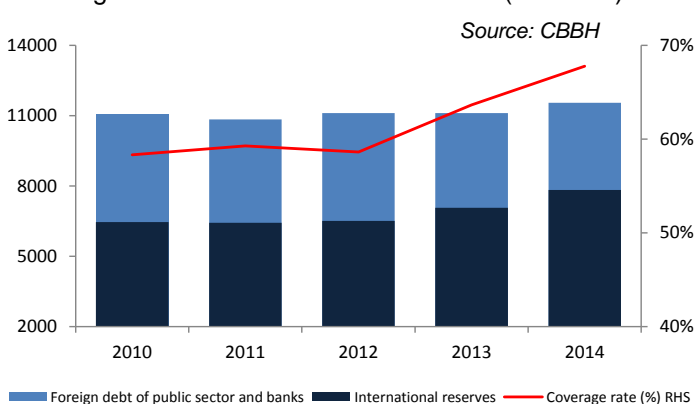


Rising share of public debt in external debt* External debt by sector (BAM mn)



*share of corporate debt estimated from the IMF data on total external debt

Coverage of public and banking FD on rise Foreign debt and international reserves (BAM mn)



Monetary Sector

Acceleration of monetary aggregates in 2014 as a result of increased lending and deposit growth

Monetary movements in 2014 were mainly marked by increased lending activity, rising deposits and external deleveraging of commercial banks. Such developments resulted in an acceleration of the average growth of monetary aggregates to around 8% y/y (vs. 4% for M1 and 5.5% for M2 in 2013), the highest growth rate since 2010. Aside from resulting from increased demand for loans, the monetary aggregate increase was supported by inflows to the government sector, based on IMF funds (VI, VII and VIII SBA tranches) and additional IFI funds for recovery of flooded regions. These inflows also resulted in a strong 11% y/y increase in CBBH international reserves, which reached a level of EUR 4bn (around 30% of GDP).

A more detailed look at developments in the banking sector reveals somewhat divergent trends in household and corporate sector lending profiles. The household sector recorded an average 5.6% y/y growth in loans, almost three times stronger in comparison to 2013. Looking at the categories of loans, the growth in the household sector was driven solely by growth in consumer loans (which comprise around 60% of total retail loans), as all other categories recorded a decline. As for the corporate sector, after relatively stable growth in 1H14, the average growth rate of loans decelerated in 2H14, mostly driven by weaker demand after the flood season and stronger deleveraging footprint. In the last two months of 2014, the lending rate in this sector fell into red territory, which intensified in January 2015. On the liability side of the banks' balance sheets, we saw an increase of deposits in all sectors, with double-digit average growth of deposits in the corporate sector (12% y/y) and strong growth in the household sector (9% y/y), supported by remittance inflows and disbursement of funds based on old foreign currency savings. The government sector also increased its deposits, primarily as a result of the above-mentioned IFI funds, thus putting the total deposit growth figure at 8.4% y/y. Such developments brought the loan-to-deposit ratio to below 110%, which is the lowest level since 2008.

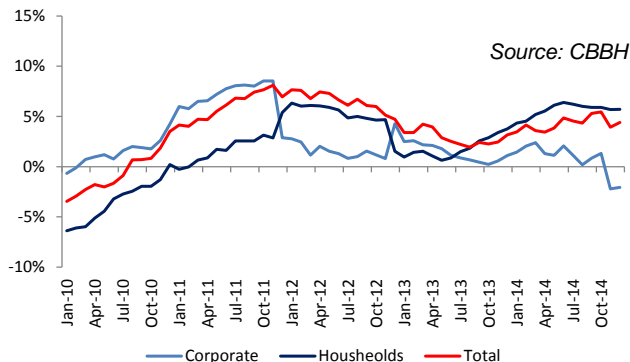
B&H banking sector still well capitalized, with increasing profitability

Financial soundness indicators show that, despite a decline of capital adequacy to 16.7% in 4Q14 (vs. 17.8% in 4Q13), the B&H banking sector is still well-capitalized, as the figure is still well above the 12% regulatory minimum. The biggest threat to the stability of banking sector is the share of NPLs in total loans, but we have also seen some improvements in that segment, with the share falling to 14% in 4Q14, vs. 15.1% a year earlier (also influenced by the liquidation of Bobar bank). At the same time, coverage of non-performing loans increased 30bp to 69.7%. As for profitability indicators, ROAA and ROAE returned to green territory during 2014, increasing to 0.8% and 6.5% in 4Q14, respectively (vs. -0.2% and -1.4% in the same period last year).

Looking forward, for 2015, we expect an acceleration of lending activity in the private sector, mostly owing to a rebound of lending in the corporate sector, with the beginning of work related to the reconstruction of flooded regions. We thus could see additional improvements of stability indicators, although we cannot exclude some upside risks to NPLs coming from the weaker performance of the corporate sector in 2H14 (resulting from flood damage).

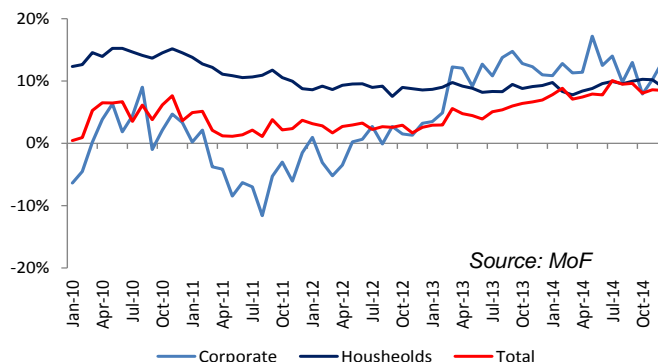
Strong household loans performance

Bank loans to institutional sectors (y/y growth, %)



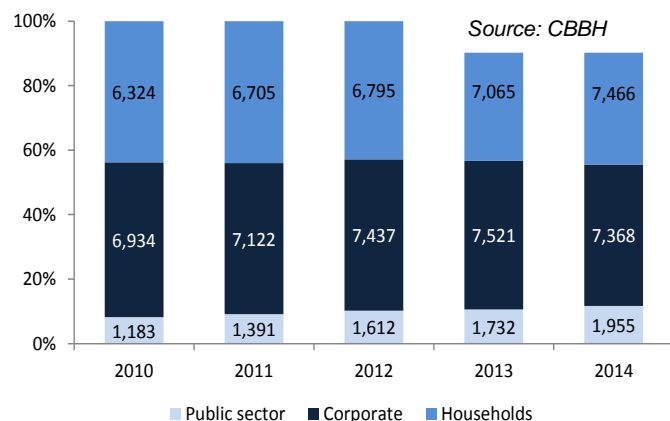
Strong deleveraging in corporate sector

Bank deposits by institutional sectors (y/y growth, %)



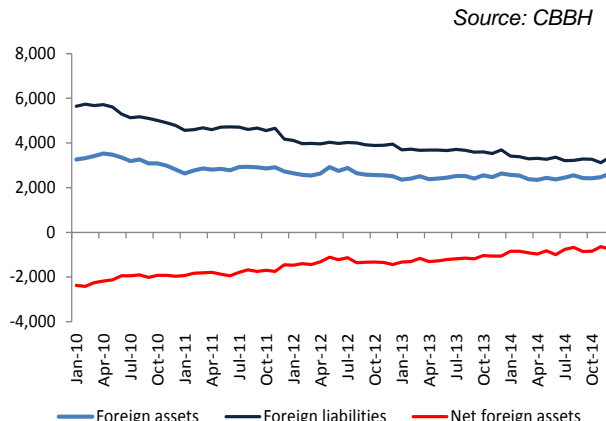
Increasing share of household loans

Total loans by institutional sector (BAM mn; %)



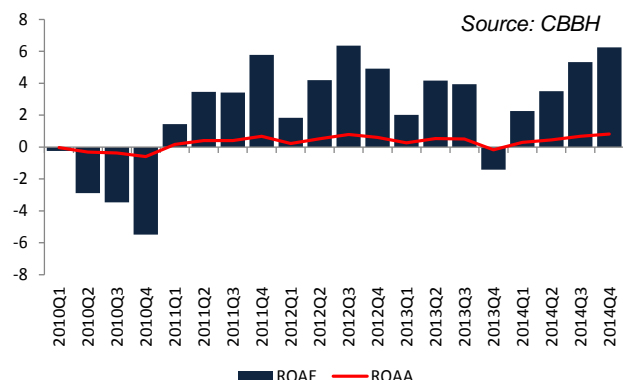
Reduced exposure to external financing

Bank foreign assets and liabilities (BAM mn)



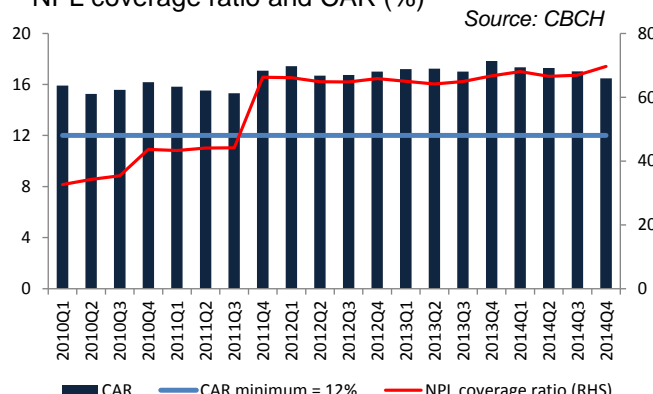
Profitability returned back into the green territory

Return on assets (ROAA) and equity (ROAE) (%)



Increased stability of banking system

NPL coverage ratio and CAR (%)



Fiscal Policy

We saw two extensions of the IMF program in 2014, mostly owing to flood-related deterioration of fiscal and external imbalances

Fiscal developments were in recent years developing under the 2Y IMF EUR 390mn stand-by arrangement framework, signed in September 2012. IMF progress reports indicate that, although the 2013 general government deficit came in at 2.2% of GDP (20bp above the 2012 figure), the government made some progress on the fiscal and reform fronts (mostly improvements in tax collection, budget transparency and business environment). However, 2014 brought notable implementation risks and reduced the reform capacity, with parliamentary elections and flood damage slowing the pace of consolidation.

The IMF approved two extensions of the program in 2014, first in January and then in June, to address the increased financing needs (matured payments to the IMF) and effects of flood damage on external and fiscal imbalances (thus bringing the total size of SBA to EUR 638mn). After three SBA tranches disbursed in 2014, the IMF concluded its last mission in December, noting the prerequisites for the eighth review under the SBA by the Executive Board, including cuts of the costs of privileged pensions, improving tax compliance and fighting tax fraud, strengthening financial sector stability and enhancing banking supervision.

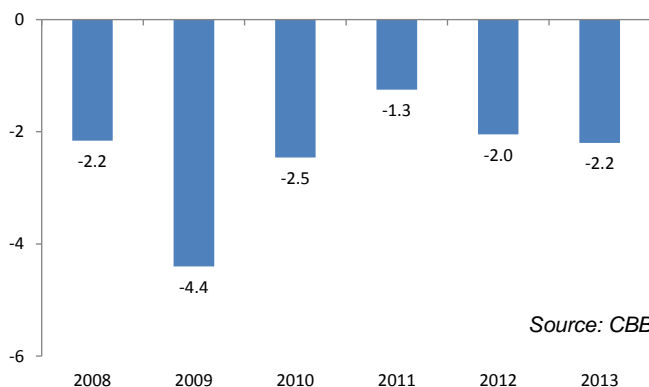
Looking at the last available data on budget execution for the first three quarters of 2014, growth of consolidated BH budget revenues outpaced expenditure growth thus widening budget surplus by 25%, to BAM 356.9mn. Such positive movements came as a result of rise in indirect tax revenues but were also strongly influenced by increase of other revenues, primarily payments of dividends in public companies (BH Telecom, Elektroprivreda and Elektroprivreda). Expenditures kept its steady pace of growth of around 2% y/y, mostly owing to a rise in social contributions and public wages. There are still no data on general government figures, but execution of state budgets indicates that the general government figure could land in line with a plan, at around 3.8% of GDP. As for the public debt, growth of the figure was mostly determined by the increase of the external part of the debt, with IMF SBA and flood-related assistance from IBRD and EIB, playing the key roles. Thus the public debt landed at around 45% of projected GDP at YE14, rising from 41.5% in 2013.

Political uncertainties putting notable implementation risks on the consolidation path

The 2015 fiscal performance will depend heavily on the political situation; with no agreement in the coalition in the first three months of 2015, we expect the reform agenda to come into focus only in the second half of the year. Also, even though the last government drafted a central government budget (federal and state budgets) for 2015, we can expect adjustments and amendments before passing final drafts to the Parliament (we still lack details on that front). Our baseline fiscal scenario for 2015 is based on more robust economic growth and continuation of the IMF program (through existing SBA terms or negotiation of new terms). We thus see a gradual decline in the general government deficit and stabilization of public debt. On the financing side, we expect smooth roll-over of T-bills on the domestic market, while the external debt financing profile will be shaped by the final negotiated form of the IMF arrangement.

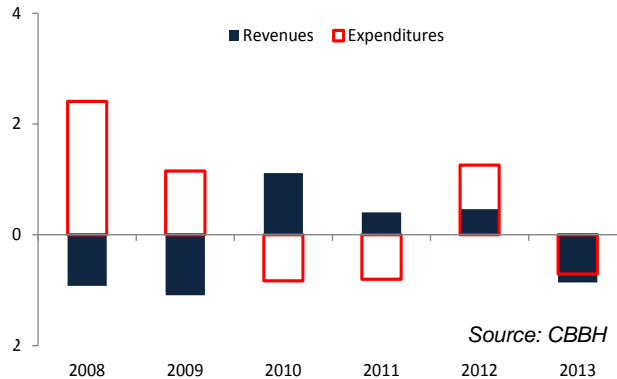
Deficit below EU benchmark of 3% since 2010

General government fiscal balance (% of GDP)



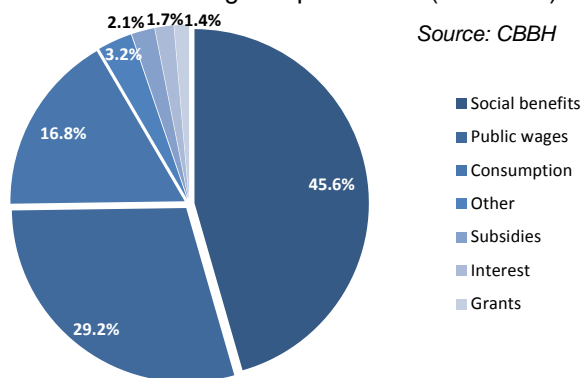
Fiscal consolidation based on expenditure cuts

Change of revenue and expenditure shares in GDP



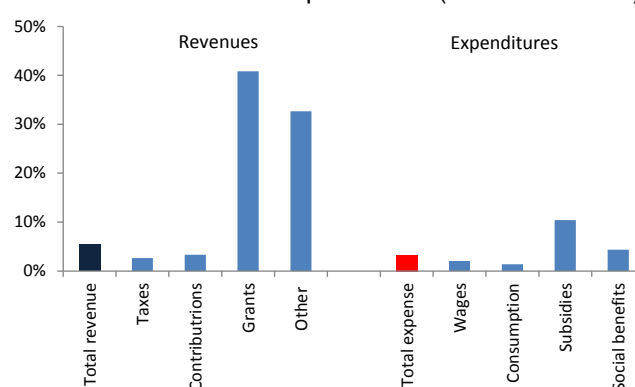
Wages and social benefits comprising 75% of budget

Categories of central budget expenditures (% of total)



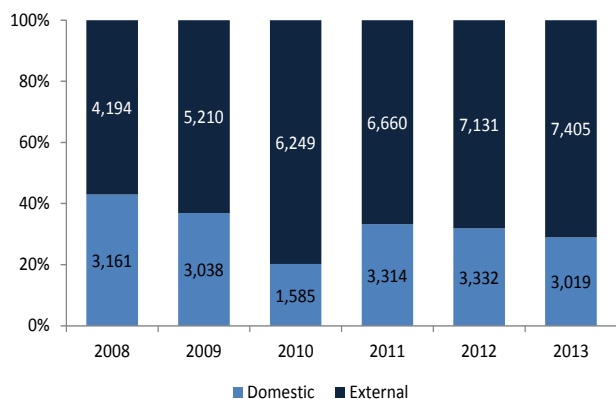
Revenues outperforming expenditures in 2014

Main revenues and expenditures (1-3Q14/1-3Q13)



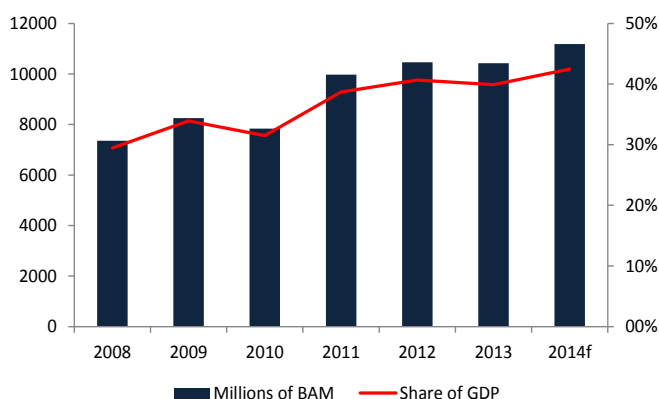
External debt dominating public debt figure

Domestic and external public debt (BAM mn, %)



Public debt breaking level of 40% of GDP

Public debt (BAM mn and % of GDP)



Politics

Due to a very complex political system October elections did not yield an unambiguous winner – negotiations still in progress

Over the last couple of months, the country's political scene was dominated by parliamentary elections held in October 2014 and subsequent process of implementation of election results and establishment of the government, as well as reviving country's accession path towards the European Union. In October 2014 the country held general elections and elected new state presidency and parliamentary assemblies on all levels (state, entity, cantons) for a four-year term.

Political parties constituted the state presidency and parliamentary assemblies on all levels, but appointing of the state council of ministers and governments of Federation and some cantons, albeit in an advanced stage, is not finalized even five months after elections. The coalition trying to form council of ministers at the state level includes Party of Democratic Action (SDA), Alliance for Change (SDS, PDP, NDP), a coalition led by Croatian Democratic Union (HDZBIH), all center-right, and Democratic Front (center-left). At entity level, Republika Srpska government was formed by Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) and its partners, while forming of government of FBH is pending a final agreement between parties trying to for majority (SDA, HDZBIH, DF).

Considering the number and diversity of parties comprising the potential majority, it is difficult to assess political direction of the new government and major policies that it plans to carry out. The accord between parties forming a majority at the state level is based on a set of rather general principles, which serve as a framework for future policies. The principles include stabilization of public finances, reduction of public spending at all government levels, economic reforms and jobs creation, continuing EU integration, fight against corruption and organized crime, ethnic and other equality, to name a few. But the specific policies, laws and measures that would effectuate those principles are yet to be defined and agreed upon.

The new approach of the EU towards B&H could result in enforcement of SSA in the near term, if the country's authorities make progress with necessary reforms

Additional emphasis on the need to carry out reforms came from the EU, which opened the possibility for a revival of the country's stalled accession process. Recent initiative taken by Germany and the UK, and endorsed by the common EU institutions, introduced a new approach towards Bosnia and Herzegovina, which should allow BiH to make certain progress on the accession path based on making reforms in areas that the country could more easily resolve, while Sejdic-Finci ruling and other more demanding issues would be dealt with at a later stage.

The new approach of the EU towards BiH could even result in enforcement of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SSA) in the near term, if the country's authorities make progress with necessary reforms. For the time being, all political parties represented in the parliaments have signed a written commitment to unlocking the process on all government levels (state, entity, cantons). The commitment includes conducting all necessary reforms in order to establish institutional functionality and efficiency to prepare the country for future membership in the EU, developing and implementing a program of measurable initial reform measures (economic and social measures, building functional market economy, accelerating reconciliation process, strengthening administrative capacities) and, at a later stage, making progress to enable solving of the Sejdic-Finci ruling.

Forecasts

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014f	2015f
Nominal GDP (BAM mn)	24,307	24,879	25,772	25,734	26,123	26,175	27,196
Population (mn)	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8
GDP per capita (EUR)	3,264	3,340	3,460	3,455	3,507	3,500	3,637
Real GDP (growth y/y %)	-2.7	0.8	1.0	-1.2	2.5	1.1	2.4
Private consumption (growth y/y %)	-4.6	0.1	15.8	3.5	-3.0	4.0	5.0
Fixed capital formation (growth y/y %)	-28.8	-15.9	15.8	3.5	-3.0	4.0	6.0
Nominal gross wages (EUR)	614	621	652	656	659	672	697
Gross wages growth (%)	8.6	1.2	5.0	0.5	0.5	2.1	3.6
CPI (y/y, average %)	-0.4	2.1	3.7	2.1	-0.1	-0.9	1.5
CPI (y/y, year end %)	1.5	0.7	2.8	1.8	-1.2	-0.4	3.1
Unemployment (%)	25.7	27.2	27.6	28.0	27.5	27.5	26.0
Exports fob (EUR mn)	2828.1	3628.8	4205.0	4018.7	4285.9	4441.1	4729.8
Imports cif (EUR mn)	6317.0	6961.7	7937.8	7798.5	7756.0	8282.4	8737.9
Trade balance (% of GDP)	-31.6	-30.7	-33.2	-34.0	-30.7	-32.3	-29.1
Current account balance (% of GDP)	-6.4	-6.2	-9.9	-9.6	-6.1	-7.0	-6.2
FDI inflow (% of GDP)	0.9	2.6	2.7	2.1	1.9	2.2	4.0
General government budget balance (% of GDP)	-4.4	-2.5	-1.3	-2.0	-2.2	-3.0	-2.0
Public debt (% of GDP)	33.9	31.5	38.7	40.7	39.9	42.8	42.0
Foreign debt to GDP (%)	53.5	51.6	49.1	52.2	50.8	54.6	53.9
EUR/BAM	1.96	1.96	1.96	1.96	1.96	1.96	1.96
USD/BAM	1.40	1.47	1.41	1.52	1.47	1.46	1.77

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Macro Outlook Bosnia and Herzegovina | Fixed Income | CEE

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